

Policy Statement

October 2008

TOPIC:

Non-physician practitioners using osteopathic titles (“D.O.”, “osteopath”, “osteopathy”).

CANADIAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION MANDATE:

The Canadian Osteopathic Association (COA) continues to be the nationally and internationally recognized body representing osteopathic medical interests in Canada. It is the COA’s mandate to continue to promote comprehensive osteopathic health care, to assist government legislative and regulatory authorities to this end, and to provide information and assistance to the public and osteopathic medical students.

BACKGROUND:

The development of osteopathic medicine (osteopathy) in North America has always been directed toward comprehensive healthcare, inclusive of medicine and surgery, as well as osteopathic manipulative treatment, which the osteopathic profession knows is integral to proper body structure and function. It is this broad scope of education and practice that defines the osteopathic profession. Great strides have been made through coordinated efforts between the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the Canadian Osteopathic Association to achieve appropriate legislation and regulations at both provincial and national levels with government regulatory and licensing authorities in Canada. However, the existence of non-physician practitioners practicing only manual therapy while using osteopathic titles is in contrast to traditional comprehensive osteopathy in North America, and has had a very negative impact on the reputation and integrity of the osteopathic medical profession in Canada. Their use of osteopathic titles has lead to public confusion and is undermining the efforts of the COA and AOA in Canada.

The COA recognizes that other countries (e.g. United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand) have evolved governmentally recognized systems of regulated “osteopathic” practice that do not include a comprehensive medical education or unrestricted medical practice rights. Nonetheless, the graduates of these programs do not have their credentials recognized by any governmental regulatory agency in North America, and the titles used by the graduates of these programs overlap with and are confused with those used by the established osteopathic profession in North America. In the United States and Canada, by statute and legal precedent, “osteopathy” is defined as osteopathic medicine.

Resolutions

Whereas:

There exists an international body of non-physician manual therapists using osteopathic terminology. Where this group co-exists with osteopathic physicians, there is confusion for the public regarding osteopathic standards, level of training, and credentials.

And Whereas:

Activities by these non-physician practitioners to advance their interests in North America while using the terminology of existing osteopathic medical practitioners undermines the efforts by the already established osteopathic medical profession in North America to have full public acknowledgement and statutory recognition of their credentials.

It is Resolved:

In the interest of protecting the public and the integrity of the osteopathic medical profession in Canada and worldwide, and in the interest of avoiding confusion of osteopathic titles between osteopathic physicians and non-physician practitioners, the Canadian Osteopathic Association (COA) has adopted the following policies:

- 1) The COA recognizes that in Canada, only those osteopathic physicians licensed to practice by a provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons shall be qualified to practice osteopathic medicine (osteopathy) and use osteopathic titles in that province. At this time, only graduates of colleges of osteopathic medicine in the United States, approved by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and COA, and accredited by the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA), are recognized by the COA as qualified osteopathic physicians.
- 2) The COA will not recognize the right or privilege of non-physician practitioners to use osteopathic titles or represent the osteopathic profession in Canada in any manner.
- 3) The COA will continue to work toward nationwide title protection for all osteopathic terms such that no person other than a licensed graduate of an AOA or COA approved osteopathic medical school may use the title "Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.)", "osteopath", "osteopathic physician", or the terms "osteopath", "osteopathic", or "osteopathy" in conjunction with the terms "doctor", "physician", "practitioner", "medicine", or any similar designations or abbreviations in any language.
- 4) The COA will continue to discourage non-physician practitioners from using prohibited osteopathic terminology and will promote other terminology for these practitioners that will not infringe upon the rights of, nor undermine the continuing efforts of the Canadian and American Osteopathic Associations.
- 5) The COA will interact with international regulatory bodies with the intent to promote practice rights in Canada and elsewhere for those trained in *comprehensive* osteopathic medical schools accredited by the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation, USA (COCA).
- 6) The COA will continue to promote a holistic and comprehensive model of osteopathic education and health care through the Osteopathic International Alliance with international regulatory bodies, and encourage such bodies to strive toward the highest standard of comprehensive osteopathic medical health care worldwide.